R E P O R T  R E S U M E S

ED 018 301 RC 002 391

TEACHING CONTENT IN SPANISH IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

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PUB DATE 10 NOV 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.16 2P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT, *ENGLISH (SECOND LANGUAGE), ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, KINDERGARTEN, LANGUAGE, LESSON PLANS, MOTIVATION, ORAL COMMUNICATION, PROGRAM CONTENT, RESEARCH, *SPANISH, SCHOOLS, *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, TEACHERS, TEXAS UNIVERSITY, SAN ANTONIO LANGUAGE RESEARCH PROJECT,

RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING SUPPORTS THE BELIEF THAT LANGUAGE STUDY SHOULD BEGIN AS EARLY AS KINDERGARTEN OR THE FIRST GRADE. EARLY TRAINING IN LANGUAGE STUDY CAN ENHANCE AND REINFORCE THE KNOWLEDGE GAINED IN AREAS SUCH AS SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, OR READING. THEREFORE, WITH THE SPANISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE, IT IS LOGICAL TO TEACH SPANISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. THE ASSUMPTION IS THAT BY ACHIEVING COMPETENCY, MATURITY, AND ORAL AND WRITTEN FLUENCY IN SPANISH, THE LEARNINGS ACQUIRED FOR SPANISH CAN BE TRANSFERRED TO THE TASK OF LEARNING ENGLISH, AND SUCCESS IN SPANISH MAY ALSO PROVIDE A STRONG MOTIVATING FORCE TO DO WELL IN OTHER AREAS OF LEARNING. WITH THIS PREMISE IN MIND, THE TEXAS UNIVERSITY SAN ANTONIO LANGUAGE RESEARCH PROJECT WAS INITIATED TO DEVELOP ORAL LANGUAGE, BOTH ENGLISH AND SPANISH, THROUGH AN INTENSIVE AUDIO-LINGUAL APPROACH. A SERIES OF LESSON PLANS WAS THEN DEVISED. IT IS HOPED THAT THE RESULTS FROM THIS STUDY CAN PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE HYPOTHESIS THAT INSTRUCTION IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF THE LEARNER THROUGH THE USE OF AUDIO-LINGUAL TECHNIQUES AND CAREFULLY SEQUENCED PLANS FOR DEVELOPING COGNITIVE ABILITIES PRODUCES MEASURABLE ACADEMIC SUCCESS. THIS REPORT WAS PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTHWEST COUNCIL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS, EL PASO, TEXAS, NOVEMBER 10-11, 1967. (ES)

ED018301

# *Teaching Content in Spanish in the Elementary School*

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Today's increasing national and international commitments make the knowledge of a second languge important to all individuals. Never in the history of our country has there been a more pressing need for more language learning by more children in more schools.

The research burgeoning in the area of second language learning supports the belief of many language specialists that language study should begin as early as kindergarten or in the first grade. The emphasis on the development of oral skills based on our knowledge of the nature of language and of language learning necessitates a longer time sequence than has been customary. Therefore, the desirability of introducing foreign languages in the elementary schools can no longer be denied. Early training in language study, if properly presented, can enhance and reinforce the knowledge gained in areas such as science, social studies or reading. The inclusion of the appropriate second language in the curriculum to teach content in the elementary schools will definitely dictate the success of such an endeavor.

In areas such as the southwestern part of the United States there exist large concentrations of persons of different cultural backgrounds and languages. One of the largest of these is the Spanish-speaking population; therefore; it would be logical to teach them Spanish as the second language in the elementary school. The assumption is that by achieving competency, maturity, and oral and written fluency in the Spanish language, the learnings acquired for Spanish can be transferred to the task of learning English. More important, their success in Spanish may provide a strong motivating force to do well in other areas of learning. With this premise in mind, the University of Texas San Antonio Language Research Project, now in its fourth year of operation, was conceived. The primary purpose of this study is to develop oral language, both English and Spanish, through an intensive audio-lingual approach, i. e., basic sentence structures, in dialogue form, practiced orally with the teacher doing the modeling for the purpose of full habituation and accurate speech usage. This approach is the technique for developing fluency in both languages.

To achieve the instruction in Spanish for these school beginners, a series of lesson plans * was devised. The content used for oral language development in both languages involved the areas of science, social studies, and reading. Short, simple sentences in the present tense (later increasing in complexity and involving several basic transformations) were utilized to present the concepts to be learned in the areas mentioned above. Phonemic problems are dealt with as they occur within the language structures, rather than dictating or restricting the choice of language. Special drills, games, rhymes are used to help the children overcome these phonemic conflicts between Spanish and English. After the children were able to handle these sentence patterns

RC 002391

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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with as few errors as possible, provisions were made to provide an opportunity to use this language in an informal communication situation.

Particularly important about the lessons being used in Spanish is the emphasis on learning *through* the language rather than concentrating solely on the language itself. By teaching these children the subject matter in their native language, in this case Spanish, they are able to concentrate more on the meaning conveyed in the sentence patterns of the lesson plans than on learning the sound system of the language as must those children being instructed in English. Hence, these children are relatively free from the primary task of concentrating on the many stumbling blocks created by a language which is very often completely foreign to them.

Also important is the fact that the usage of correct grammatical and phonological forms via the audiolingual technique will provide the children with the linguistic models necessary to remediate dialectical errors and concomitantly enhance the range of vocabulary and fluency in their native language. Since the lesson plans are taught in the Spanish language, these children learn much more rapidly, since they do not have to concentrate on both the language and meanings being developed as do the children being instructed in English. In most cases, the children's main concern is the task at hand, i. e., the relationships of the concepts which are made more meaningful because they are taught in a language they can understand. Being able to understand helps to give these children that crucial confidence which underlies success in academic learning, and helps to give them the confidence which underlies success in academic learning, and helps to give them the confidence and abilities needed for learning English.

It is hoped that the results from this study can provide substantial evidence to support the hypothesis that instruction in the native language of the learner through the use of audio-lingual techniques and carefully sequenced plans for developing cognitive abilities produces measurable academic success. If so, it can provide the support for further expansion of a bilingual program in the schools for children whose first or native language is other than English. Of significance also will be the implication that by having such a program, English-speaking children could acquire another language by the same process.

* These plans are available and can be obtained by writing to Dr. Thomas D. Horn, Director, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.